



NORM COLEMAN

UNITED STATES SENATOR • MINNESOTA



USDA Must Crack Down on Sugar Imports

by Senator Norm Coleman

As many folks in the Red River Valley already know, the U.S. Department of Agriculture made a grievous error this summer when they agreed to offer Mexico generous and unwarranted access to the U.S. sugar market, while failing to eliminate barriers for our own sugar farmers who want to export to our southern neighbor. This action has depressed U.S. sugar prices and threatens to cost taxpayers millions of dollars in farm program expenditures that should not have been necessary.

This is an especially difficult pill to swallow given the written pledge I secured from Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns last summer indicating he would not allow excess sugar imports - from Mexico or anywhere else - to undermine the no-net-cost operation of the domestic sugar program. The July 27th agreement USDA made with Mexico threatens this commitment, and I refuse to allow this action to go unchecked.

Accordingly, I pressed the incoming Undersecretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, Mark Keenum, to commit to restoring the balance of the U.S. sugar market and

eliminate the risk of sugar loan forfeitures that threaten the no-net-cost operation of the sugar program during his recent confirmation hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee. With his confirmation, Mr. Keenum will oversee U.S. sugar policy at USDA and it is imperative that he understand this critical issue.

It was reassuring to hear Mr. Keenum speak candidly about this issue – admitting that USDA had allowed more Mexican imports than necessary and acknowledging these actions have brought the government very close to forfeitures. Mr. Keenum also made it clear that he understands USDA must operate the sugar program at no-net-cost to the taxpayer and that it is incumbent upon the government to comply. This guiding principle is the heart of our domestic sugar policy and it is crucial that the federal government uphold the commitments it has made to our sugar growers.

Rest assured, I will hold Mr. Keenum to his word and will push USDA to mitigate this faulty agreement so that it fulfills its obligation to our farmers and the American people.